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WOLF JOURNAL

Readers React to *Wolf Journal*

I picked this book up and did not set it down until I reached the end, many tears later. I have passed the great divide of middle age, and found the story gripping. I am convinced that "Wolf Journal" would have similar impact on readers from 5th grade up. There is enough school interaction and coming-of-age content to hook the younger readers and teenagers, and plenty of action, suspense, adventure, legend, information and powerful emotion to grab the rest of us.

Kathy J. Reynolds
Middle School Librarian
Oberlin, Ohio

Not all stars of young adult fiction are female, rest assured. The high school boy in Brian Connolly's luminous "Wolf Journal" is perhaps the most memorable character from these reading suggestions. I picked up "Wolf Journal" one morning and began reading the first few pages, expecting to make a cup of tea while I read on. I have to admit that I never got around to reaching for the tea bags as I was so drawn into Connolly's book that I finished it in one sitting. To explain too much of the plot would spoil it, but let's say that this tale of a young boy's love of the wilderness, wolves, and writing is simply wonderful. In this beautifully conceived and well-crafted novel, the author combines a good story with environmental themes and Native American mysticism, making "Wolf Journal" well worth a trip to the Bookstore.

From: Review by Sally Rosenthal
Best Friends Magazine, July/August 2002
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Outside of its local interest, "Wolf Journal" is a sensitive telling of the conflict between humans and nature, and of the attempt by some to reconcile the two. Young readers should find it intriguing, and their parents might find it worth reading for the family discussions it could provoke.

George Petrisek
Curmudgeon News Services
Port Allegany, Pennsylvania

I love "Wolf Journal"! It is one of those books that, as you read it, you say to yourself, "I wish I could write like that." I can also say that, as I read it, I felt as though I were there. Painting pictures with words is a real gift, and "Wolf Journal" comes across in Technicolor. To say it was very "Jack Londonesque" would not do it justice.

Tom Lake, editor
Hudson River Almanac
Wappingers Falls, New York

This is a wonderfully intriguing novel written for young adults but enjoyable for all ages. Connolly masterfully weaves a tale of life, love and nature.

John William Uhler
Total Yellowstone Page
www.yellowstone-natl-park.com
Gardiner, Montana

“Wolf Journal,” the young adult novel adults should read, is set in the Allegheny Mountains of northern Pennsylvania. Jimmy Warren, a farm boy, finds wolf tracks in the snow. No wolves have been in these woods for a hundred years. The tracks lead him deeper into his passion for nature guided by Hawk, an old Susquehannock storyteller. Along the way, Jimmy falls in love with the beautiful Sherry Woolman who shares his love of the wild. As a school project, Jimmy keeps a journal on wolves. In order to protect the wolf he’s discovered, Jimmy writes about him as if he is fiction. The Tanner brothers, a derelict pair of would-be bounty hunters, threaten to destroy the perfect balance of nature that Jimmy has found. “Wolf Journal” is a journey into the natural world where intricate details, like the imprint of a wing in snow, tell a larger story, one of endangered species, an endangered planet, and the human spirit that strives to understand and protect.

WOLF JOURNAL

a novel

Brian A. Connolly

Virtualbookworm.com Publishing
College Station, Texas

Aldo Leopold quote: From A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC: AND SKETCHES HERE AND THERE by Aldo Leopold, copyright 1945, 1977 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

Cover Photograph: The Druid Peak Pack, copyright 1997 by Dan and Cindy Hartman. Used by permission. Courtesy of Wildlife Along the Rockies Gallery, Silver Gate, Montana.

Author photograph by Heather Jerome.

This novel is a work of fiction. The characters and events are products of the author's imagination. Any similarity to real people and events is coincidental.

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

For Nathan and Heather
who love things wild
and
The Druid Peak Pack of Yellowstone
whose inspiration is the heart of *Wolf Journal*

In Memory of:
Joe, Alyce, Peter and Sharon Connolly
and
Dennis J. Hannan

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Author's Note:

In July of 1997, I spent two cold nights and three freezing mornings standing near the confluence of Soda Butte Creek and the Lamar River in Yellowstone hoping to get a glimpse of one of the wolves released there during the 1995-96 reintroduction program. The early morning temperatures were near freezing. The valley is approximately 7000 feet above sea level with mountains rising another 2500 feet on either side. The valley is open rangeland with dried grasses and sagebrush, excellent for spotting wildlife. The mountains are partially forested with Douglas fir and aspen, and, above tree line, rock cliffs are exposed.

With a few others, I waited and waited. We saw a golden eagle, a bald eagle, several ravens, a black bear, a small herd of bison, and a few elk and pronghorn antelope. Even several coyotes. But no sign of a wolf. Down by the streams, Sand Hill Cranes called in raspy voices. Along the water's edge, river otters played slippery games.

On the morning of the third day I arrived at four a.m. This was to be my last day in the park. Several people joined me by five a.m. I had been standing still for two hours watching my breath hang in the frozen air when I heard the first howl. It came from the thick pines at the base of Druid Peak where biologists had located a den site. That first howl, long and mournful, was joined by a second, a third, then two or three more. Their songs filled the forest like a choir in a great cathedral. The howling continued for fifteen minutes followed by five minutes of silence. Then a wolf appeared on the ridge above us several hundred

yards away. She was gray with some brown and white, approximately eighty-five pounds. She walked among the dried grasses and sagebrush to a sunny spot where she stretched out on her side. Soon she was joined by four pups, three grays and a black, each twenty-five pounds having been born in April. They leapt on her and each other; bit tails and ears, and fought over sticks and pinecones.

I was overwhelmed. I had spent a lot of time in wild places, but never thought I'd see anything like this. There was nothing between those wolves and me except wildflowers. Even though tears were welling up, I couldn't stop smiling. I stayed in the park ten more days. Since that morning I have logged several hundred sightings each time wondering how it would be if the wolves I was seeing were in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania where I grew up.

Every summer now I camp at Pebble Creek in the Lamar Valley. It was in a tent there where much of this novel was written. Even though the story has no direct connection to the Yellowstone wolves, *Wolf Journal* is my reaction to that frozen morning when I saw my first wolf in the wild.

BACconnolly
Bend, Oregon

*We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire
dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever
since, that there was something new to me in those eyes-
something known only to her and to the mountain.*

Aldo Leopold
from 'Thinking like a Mountain'
A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There,
1945

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wj 18 January

The full moon colors the mist in the dark woods a pale yellow. Shadows move slowly along the creek bank, a wolf pack, two gray adults with five pups, their first hunt. Their undulating reflections brush against the moon floating in a deep pool below rapids. The alpha male reads the wind, inhales a familiar scent and bolts up the hillside. His mate leaps over rocks to follow him. The pups, almost as large as their parents, scramble in a disorganized line behind her. Their breathing is heavy, tongues lolling as they crest the mountaintop. Intermittently, each body is bathed in moonlight, a long line of silvery predators, muscles flexing under thick fur with every stride.

Ahead, an injured whitetail limps along a trail. The deer whirls around in a circle too confused by the rush of the pack to take flight. As the moon follows its well-worn path across the sky, the wolves feed. When the first stain of light appears, a single stroke across the eastern sky, the alpha male begins to howl, long, low notes like a mournful wind gradually rising then trailing off. The pups and the female join in, each voice, separated by a subtle octave, singing the same plaintive notes.

The song of the wolf is among the most beautiful sounds in

nature. The lonesome howl, the excited yaps and barks, the intimidating growl all symbolize wilderness. My father says the only true wilderness is one in which the entire food chain is intact. He says because the wolf has been exterminated in Pennsylvania, there is no wilderness left in our state. "A forest without the wolf," he said, "is just a big park."

It has been a hundred years since the wild wolf's voice has been heard in the Allegheny Mountains. According to Hawk, an Indian friend of mine, a dozen wolf packs once roamed the upper Allegheny valley north and south of our village. His people, the Susquehannocks, told stories about how wolves would sing them to sleep when they were gathered around the fire in their winter lodges. Once asleep, the wolves would speak to them in dream. Hawk's ancestors understood wolf and came to know their hunt stories, reunion stories and birth stories.

One of the stories was the *Going Away Tale* that was about the death of a great wolf. He was the largest wolf in the valley and led a pack of twenty animals. The Indians knew this wolf as Shadow because he was all black. According to the wolves who sang his tale, Shadow was a supreme hunter, a brave leader, a loyal mate and a protective parent. He was known to run over these mountains as much as forty miles in a day leading the pack to elk and buffalo which also lived in our valley during the last century.

Shadow's story mostly focused on his going away, his death. When he was very old, he was kicked by an elk. Shadow wandered off alone into the deep woods to die. The other wolves could hear his death song coming from a distant ridge between two hills. His howls, however, were not of despair, but of joy and hope. The lyrics spoke of the many gifts with which Shadow had been blessed. One by one he called the individual names of his pack distributing strength to this one, cunning to that one, honor to a third, understanding to a fourth, stamina to another, courage to a young one and so on. In his going away, Shadow had given himself back to the pack. By sunrise his song ceased.

In the valley a howl began. At first one voice sang out, then two, then five more until the entire pack called to the morning sky. The chorus, heard as if from some ancient cathedral, was not a call to hunt or a cry of loss, but was a sincere tribute to their lost leader.

The Indians say that the legend of Shadow explains to them

why wolves live and hunt cooperatively. Each has his own talent to add to the strength of the family, the pack. Hawk's ancestral tribe believed the dream stories revealed to them important truths about how to conduct their own lives. That is why they followed the way of the wolf and, to this day, honor its spirit in their art and dance.

Aaron raised his hand. The class was silent.
“Yes, Aaron?” said Mr. Fletcher, his slim English teacher.

“So, what you’re saying is that we should keep a weekly journal on any topic we choose. Like I could do dirt bikes or fishing or girls!” He raised both eyebrows and smiled at Sara.

“Right, Aaron, although you may wish to wait a few years before you write about girls.” Several boys snickered.

“We’ll never have that much to say on one topic, Mr. Fletcher,” said Sara tossing her red curls.

“You’ll have plenty to say if you pick the right subject. It must be something you are really interested in, something you are really passionate about other than the opposite sex.” Mr. Fletcher looked at Aaron. “All of our journal entries since September have been about different subjects. However, a page or two about something hasn’t allowed us to go into depth. This topic approach will help us avoid shallowness in our writing and thinking, help us to really explore something that is important to us.

“There is a girl right in this class who can talk all day and all night about computers. There is a person here who not only fly fishes, but ties her own flies and sells them. In order to do that, she has to understand the life cycles of many insects, the feeding

habits of trout as well as which colors and patterns most effectively mimic bugs. We have a classmate who has won gold medals at the state and national level in archery, another girl with a black belt, a boy who can do back flips off a jump with his snowboard and a boy who knows a lot about organic crop farming. There is a girl in my afternoon class who sews pieces of cloth together to create beautiful quilts each of which tells a story from her family history. In that same class is another girl who has a fine collection of spiders and snakes. For ninth graders, you are amazing people.

“Now, to help you discover what you are most interested in, number to ten on your paper. List ten specific things you like. Don’t write animals. That’s too general. Write wolf!”

Jimmy looked up, his eyes wide. He had already written wolf down. He wondered if Mr. Fletcher knew his secret.

“I can only think of five things,” Ricky called out from the back of the room.

Susan whispered, “Put down ‘after school detention.’”

“Not funny,” said Ricky.

Mr. Fletcher asked, “Did you list music, art, cars, fishing, running, tennis, cooking, baseball cards or magic? What about juggling? Once you have your list complete, circle the best topic for you.”

The teacher paced up and down the rows of desks inspecting lists, making suggestions. “Jimmy, you only have one thing on your list,” he said.

“I know,” said Jimmy. “It’s what I want to write about.”

“I’ll make you a deal,” Mr. Fletcher said, “if after you write down nine more topics, you still want to do wolves, you can do it. A deal?”

“A deal,” Jimmy said.

Mr. Fletcher continued to the class, “Now, in this journal you will be going into great depth. You’ll be including a lot of facts about your subject, but what I really want is for you to go beyond facts. Explore why you’re so excited about the subject you’ve chosen. What is it that draws you to it; what is the source of that power? Does your subject ignite your imagination and, if so, where does that imagination take you?”

“For example, if you are writing about dance, ballet or modern, what do you see when you close your eyes and think about being on stage? What music is playing? How does it feel to be

graceful? What do you communicate to the audience when you move a certain way? How is your dancing like painting or sculpting or playing the violin?"

Jimmy looked up the next row at Sherry. Her corn silk hair curled about her shoulders catching light the way a waterfall does in the early morning sun. As if she could feel his eyes on her, she turned and looked at him. He turned away quickly feeling a flush come to his face. To cover his embarrassment, Jimmy raised his hand. "I wrote down ten things and I still want to do wolves. Is that okay?"

"Yes, Jimmy," said Mr. Fletcher.

"Hey, Jimmy," said Big Charlie, "my dad says that wolves are devils. The best kind is one that's been shot through the head!" He laughed.

Fletcher gave him a look. "Your father isn't writing a journal! Let me see your list, Charles. Very good: ballet, sewing, cooking pastries." Everyone except Big Charlie laughed.

"That's not what I wrote," he muttered.

Fletcher said, "See, Charles, it's not nice to make fun of someone else's topic." Big Charlie's face darkened and he brooded over his paper.

Jimmy said, "It's okay, Mr. Fletcher. I don't pay him no mind. Would it be okay if we drew some pictures in our journal to illustrate what we are writing about?" He had already started a sketch of a wolf running through a forest.

"That's fine as long as your entries have a few pages of writing. Remember, writing is ultimately what journal writing aims to improve."

"Oh, Mr. Fletcher," Jimmy continued, "I have a journal at home that I made last summer. It doesn't have any writing in it yet. Could I use that one?"

"What do you mean 'you made'?" said Fletcher.

"Well, I just made the cover. My mom cut paper and sewed it in so I could draw and write. It's the same size as a regular old composition book."

Fletcher said, "I think the more personalized your journal is, the better. Go ahead, use it."

Jimmy's imagination had already begun to bloom. The class-

room sounds diminished as if a volume control was being turned down until everything was just a whisper. The soundtrack in Jimmy's head grew in intensity as the movie that he watched there came into focus. Wind sweeping through the woods near the head of Two Mile Creek caused leafless trees to creak and crowded branches to drum against one another. Snow blew around the head of the valley settling in soft humps over rock or in long drift ridges north of each tree trunk creating a white sculptured garden through which Jimmy hiked.

The late afternoon light was thin. The sky was in the woods which meant from this point on it was all downhill to the farm on Lillibridge Creek. Jimmy scanned the dark tree trunks for woodpeckers, branches for hawks, owls or roosting turkeys. He watched the far woods for whitetail deer and surveyed the ground nearby for tracks of any kind. He loved the stories the woods told him: the place where the buck rubbed velvet from his antlers, the dense berry patch where quail fed, the drama of hoof and wing and paw played out in creek mud or in newly fallen snow. Well those tracks he read as if they were words printed on a line across a white page.

The best tracking was when he found a new print, one with which he was not familiar or a variation of one he thought he knew. It had been like that the previous spring when he found the mink tracks along the creek near the barn. He had thought otter, then fisher, but something wasn't quite right about those choices. In his notebook he wrote date, time, location, mud conditions and rejected choices. He drew the tracks in intricate detail across the margins so that he could have the design of each track as well as the paired pattern they made which was always an important clue to solving the mystery of identification. He also recorded the distance between tracks and the depth of each, indicators of size and weight depending on mud consistency. Later, Jimmy discovered that his drawings matched the mink tracks in his field guide. The dark, sleek critters hadn't been seen in the valley for many years. This was a real find, which he kept a secret to protect the animals from local trappers.

In his daydream, Jimmy crossed Two Mile Creek and followed a deer run through a stand of birch to a cluster of white pines. Their wide branches floated like green clouds against the gray sky, a stark contrast to the dull winter colors that surrounded

them.

Where there was just a dusting of snow under the pines, Jimmy rested. The circles of exposed ground covered with wheat colored pine needles told him that deer had bedded down there earlier in the day, three adults and a yearling. Pinecone scales spread about on the snow indicated squirrels living in these trees.

He picked up a soft, gray owl pellet, which resembled a pussy willow bud, and broke it open. Inside, the skeletal remains of a field mouse, tiny foot and leg bones, a hip joint, a skull. The life and death struggle played itself out in his head: the silent beating of owl wings, the mouse scream, the closing talons. The light snow in the dark woods.

There were many trails that led out from the pines. Jimmy took the one that headed most directly toward the farm. He hadn't gone more than a hundred yards when he came upon another intersecting trail with fresh tracks he did not recognize. He had run into wild dogs along this ridge before, but none had ever left tracks this big. Dogs always traveled in pairs or small groups. This was a single individual. Jimmy knew, too, that a full-grown coyote track might measure two and a half inches in length. These tracks, however, were almost twice that long.

Jimmy was sketching in his notebook one paw print per page when the bell rang signaling the end of English class. The problem with school, he thought, was that it kept interrupting him, pulling him back out of his imagination, which is really where he wanted to spend the rest of the day. There was a whole world of mystery there waiting to be explored. Instead, he had to go to history class and learn about a bunch of civilizations whose tracks had been erased years ago.

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